

Feature

The Revolution that is Helping the Disabled

One-tenth of the people in the world have experienced some sort of disability, half preventable with modern technology, proper nutrition and living conditions — or just common sense. Ten years ago the WHO, UNICEF and the UNDP got together to create IMPACT to help organise the prevention and treatment of disability. As Gemini News Service reports, they say the success of the past 10 years shows a revolution has begun. by Gillian Forrester

A revolution in prevention of disability has begun, say experts from around the world. In 1981 only 20 per cent of the world's children were immunised against diseases like polio, diphtheria, tetanus, tuberculosis, measles and whooping cough. Ten years later the number has soared to 80 per cent.

Much credit for this goes to ten-year-old IMPACT, which is working to spread technology, education, and organisation to the tenth of the world's population that are disabled.

Top directors and advisers from 15 countries have just attended IMPACT's second conference at the magnificent 16th Century Leeds Castle near London. They say the progress of the last decade is revolutionary.

IMPACT was launched by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Progress has been remarkable.

Only in 1981 UNICEF bought its first supply of oral rehydration salts to keep people with diarrhoea from dying of dehydration. Now, millions of packets of salts are being used every day.

In the United States, deaths from cardio-vascular disease have gone down for the first time in history because of improved diet and exercise.

In India, train cars set up as operating rooms and treatment facilities are going out to people who would otherwise have no access to operations. In the first few weeks, 2,300 people signed up for treatment.

It is estimated that 70 million people in the develop-

ment world could have sight, movement or hearing restored by basic surgery.

But priorities still have to be set straight. In developing nations, there are still seven soldiers for every medical worker.

Sir John Wilson, chairman of IMPACT, believes there are enough resources in the world to treat and prevent all disability. He was blinded by a chemical accident at the age of 12. He and half the world's 450 million disabled have disabilities that could have been prevented, according to IMPACT.

When IMPACT estimated 10 years ago that \$100 million would be needed to fund a world-wide immunisation project, it was seen as an unreachable goal. Since then, more than \$350 million have been raised by groups like the Rotary Club and the flow does not seem to have a limit.

As Professor Ramalingaswami of India says, most of the cost of new schemes has been covered by governments and people in local communities working more creatively.

In Thailand, IMPACT wanted to check the hearing of school children, but found there was no place quiet enough to do the testing. Then came the idea of using Buddhist temples. Buddhist monks in every community volunteered the use of the meditation room and many are now helping with the testing.

British delegate to the conference Dr Ralph Henderson said prevention of disability is not just an option, it is a question of survival for the human race.

As the world's population increases and ages, ironically caused in part by improved health care, disability which prevents people from working and going to school is more and more costly.

There is a greater possibility than ever before of doing something to help because today's disabilities are not caused just by naturally occurring diseases. Death from traffic and domestic accidents exceeds death by disease in people under 50 in developing nations. There is also pollution, tobacco, political strife and mal-

nutrition.

Timothy Rothermel, of the UNDP, said "It's a question of being creative, of making new sorts of organisations, not just governments and NGOs," as well as creating new laws. It also meant a change in priorities, away from investing the bulk of resources in big medical equipment that might save only a few lives.

Putting a little iodine into the diets of people in Zaire has brought the number of those born with mental handicaps down from 90 in 1000 to 18 in 1000. The two iodine tablets required to help one person cost only 5 US cents, the price of a piece of chewing gum.

New technology is a crucial factor in change as well. While years ago there was no cure for leprosy, it can now be cured in six months if the patient receives treatment every day. Scientists are now testing a drug hoped to cure the disease in months. By the end of the century, there is hope for a vaccine.

In testing the new drug, the WHO is finding it difficult to identify people who have never

been treated for the disease — another sign of progress.

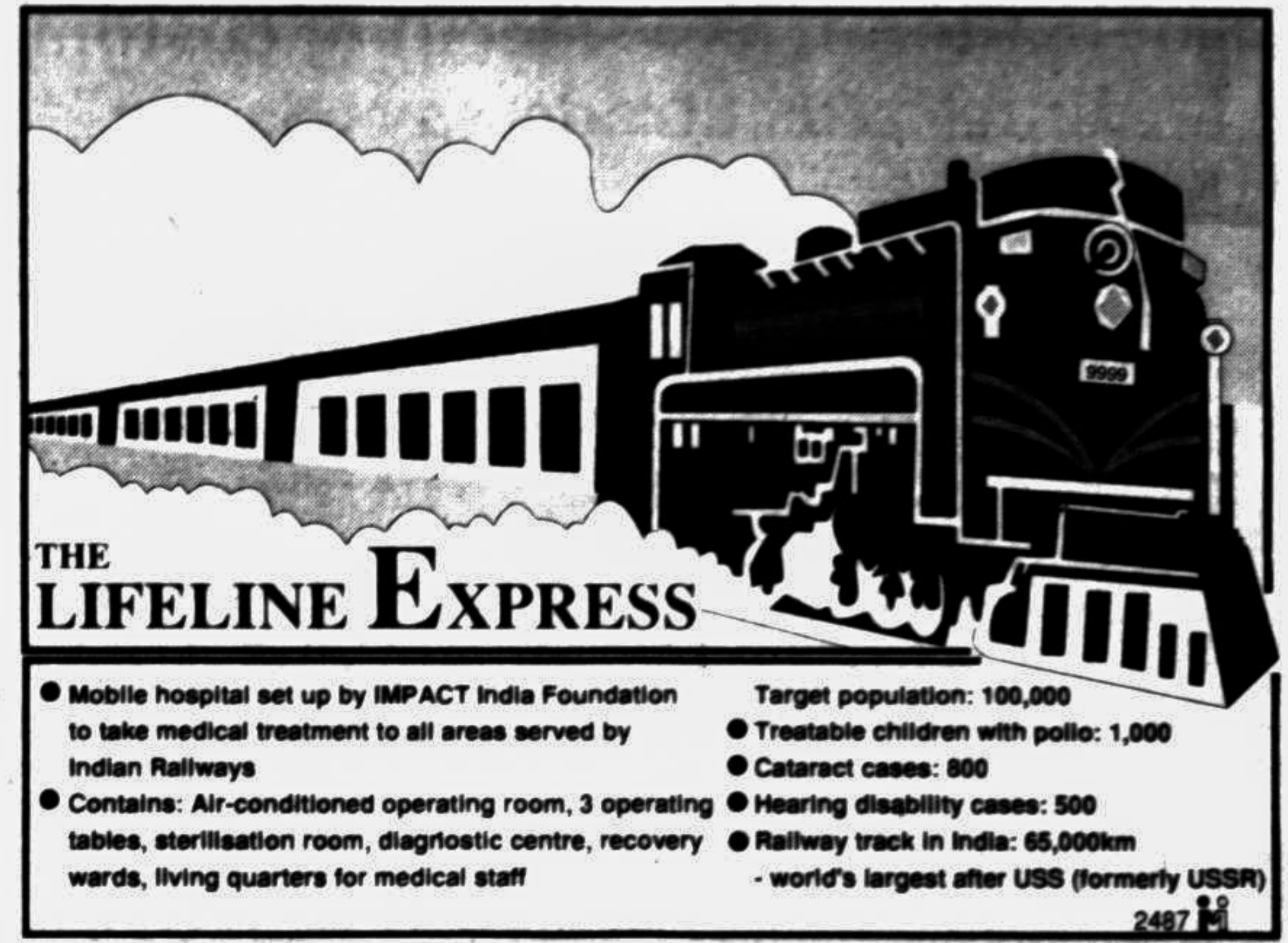
A higher standard of living rid industrial nations of the disease 150 years ago, showing that improved health and development go hand in hand.

Contaminated water in areas of India is the cause of the spread of Guinea worm disease. Says Ramalingaswami: "Until recently it was a forgotten disease of forgotten people." Clean water has brought it down dramatically in certain communities.

Says Rothermel: "It's the empowerment of people. And a great opportunity for investment for people in the business of medicine. Countries have to learn that they cannot just invest in industries and infrastructure, they have to invest in healthy people."

Dr. Harold Snider, blind at birth, is working with the National Council for Disability in the United States. He says the biggest problem is that 37 million Americans have no health insurance.

He gives the example of a worker injured on the job who needs surgery but has no in-



- Mobile hospital set up by IMPACT India Foundation to take medical treatment to all areas served by Indian Railways
- Contains: Air-conditioned operating room, 3 operating tables, sterilisation room, diagnostic centre, recovery wards, living quarters for medical staff
- Target population: 100,000
- Treatable children with polio: 1,000
- Cataract cases: 800
- Hearing disability cases: 500
- Railway track in India: 65,000km
- world's largest after USSR (formerly USSR)

urance and cannot pay for it. The person then becomes a financial burden who would be worth more to the family dead so they could collect social security.

Snider sees a day when all Americans benefit from a safety net insurance programme such as exists already in the state of Hawaii.

In North America in particular, publicity campaigns and laws have had a remarkable effect on smoking, and wearing seatbelts while driving. "Say no to drugs" is a popular theme for pop music groups like the

New Kids on the Block.

New technology means more and more disabilities are becoming avoidable. Blindness from diabetes has been reduced by 60 per cent by the use of lasers to keep blood vessels in the eyes from bursting. Researchers think that huge doses of steroids within eight hours of spinal cord injuries can restore use of limbs that otherwise would have been paralysed.

Changing the attitudes of able-bodied people towards the disabled is another challenge. Snider believes things in the US are improving. The

plight of the disabled was mentioned in the US presidential election campaign for the first time ever in 1988, and President Bush's administration has hired more disabled people than any other.

IMPACT-founder Wilson wants an end to the days when blind or deaf women in developing nations end up in brothels, where the disabled fight for places to beg in Calcutta, and where the disabled are shuffled away and given special treatment when what they really want is to participate.

— GEMINI NEWS

FAO Reassesses Food Aid Policy

Not all food aid is the cheap resource that it was in the past, nor has it always been effective in substantially improving the nutrition of the poor.

As a unique strategy against hunger and malnutrition, food aid is likely to increase in the 1990s. But it will be needed less in Asia and the Pacific which has reduced its dependence on food aid in recent years.

In fact, the good overall food production and economic performance in the region is reflected in a relatively modest growth in food imports. Significantly there was a dramatic 7 per cent annual decline in the share of food aid in total cereal imports.

Still, "even under optimistic scenarios, demand for food aid" will increase, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

In a report on food aid and its role in the 1990s, FAO says that maintaining the current share of food aid in food imports means an increase of up to 20 million tons of cereals in the year 2000.

FAO estimates that while the incidence of undernutrition is declining in developing countries, there will still be 500 million undernourished people in the year 2000.

"Food aid in the 1990s needs to be transformed into a more flexible resource and used more efficiently," says the report prepared by FAO's Committee on World Food Security. The report makes several recommendations, including increasing food aid stocks.

It also calls for a "more flexible" use of cash — instead of in kind — where appropriate. In cases when food is required for direct contribution, local purchases or between developing countries should be encouraged.

"In general, the nutritional effectiveness of food aid is improved if the commodities provided are consistent with local dietary habits," the report says. "If not, food aid could be wasted or gradually change consumption habits and preferences.

The beneficiaries may become dependent on imported foods, with negative impact on food security.

The report notes that reliance on imported food outside of recipient areas may break the link between diet and availability of local foods, adversely affecting local production. If food is not scarce in the areas, the report suggests that cash might be better.

"Not all food aid is the cheap resource that it was in the past, nor have past food aid practices always been effective in substantially improving the nutrition of the poor unless linked with other forms of assistance," the report noted.

Import between 145 and 168 million tons of cereals. During the second half of the 1980s, food made up 9 per cent of total imports of developing countries. The share of food in total imports was highest in North Africa and the Near East (15.1 per cent) and lowest in Asia and the Pacific (5.9 per cent).

From 1970-89, the share of food in total imports in Asia and the Pacific has been declining by 6.3 per cent annually.

Since the mid-1950s, considerable amounts of food aid have been provided to food-deficit countries. During the late 1980s, total food aid averaged US\$2,860 million a year. Of this, US\$2,560 — or 90 per cent — went to poor, food-deficit countries.

During the same period, about 12 million tons of commodities were released annually as food aid. Up to 95 per cent of that was in cereals, the rest made up of vegetable oil, dried skim milk and pulses.

Five donors — the United States, European Community, Canada, Japan and Australia — provided about 95 per cent of total food aid in cereals. Just two donors — the US and the EC — account for most of the non-cereal food aid shipments.

Food aid in cereals constitutes a very small and declining share of total world cereal production. During the second half of the 1980s, this amounted to less than 1 per cent.

For developing countries, food aid in cereals have never amounted to a large share of their domestic production. In Sub-Saharan Africa, this averaged 7.4 per cent in 1984-88, and growing. However, in more than 40 countries, the share of cereal food aid in total cereal imports still exceeds 40 per cent.

But in Asia and the Pacific in the same period, the ratio of food aid to domestic production of cereals averaged only half of 1 per cent — and declining at an annual rate of 7 per cent.

Food aid started 35 years ago when huge surpluses were built up in the United States. There was strong pressure to transfer the surplus to developing countries to pursue multiple objectives, including humanitarian ones. As long as the source of food aid was burdensome surpluses to the major donor countries, the food aid they sent was invariably considered additional development assistance.

This trend is changing. During the mid-1970s when world cereal markets were tight, food aid shipments declined considerably. But in more recent years, when the world markets were amply supplied with large surpluses, a big jump in cereal food aid has not taken place.

Handicapped Chinese Stand on Their Own

There are 1.59 million handicapped people working in China. Generally, their income is no less than what an average worker makes. by Ma Guihua

I don't want to be my parents' burden," says Liu Chunmet in sign language. "Work has broadened my vision."

Ms Liu is a 28-year-old deaf-mute. She has been working at the Beijing Sanlu Factory since graduation from the Beijing No 1 School for the Deaf-Mute ten years ago.

She is one of the 400 deaf-mutes (among 1,035 workers) employed at the Beijing Sanlu Factory, famous for its Dabao series of cosmetics. The factory reserves 70 per cent of its earnings for its own use and turns the rest to the government for funding other enterprises and welfare programmes like homes for elders who have no children and for orphanages.

Every year the factory takes in graduates from Beijing's four schools for deaf-mutes. "We think we are also producing good social results along with economic profits by employing the handicapped," says Lu Shiyang, the Party secretary of the factory.

"We mean to help them win social respect and enhance confidence in life," he says. Respect and confidence is what China hopes to provide for over 51 million handicapped people, or 5 per cent of the country's population.

China's gains in providing confidence and respect to its handicapped population are a rare success in most developing countries where this disadvantaged group is often forgotten and ignored.

"The successes of health

care in Asia and the Pacific in recent decades, however impressive and welcome they may be, have not resolved the full range of health problems and rehabilitation, especially among the region's disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups," notes the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

The ESCAP will convene in Manila on October 7-11 the Fourth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Welfare and Social Development. Health care will be among the social issues that will be addressed by the conference.

On average, every one out of five Chinese families has a member suffering from disability — like loss of eyesight, hearing and speech, physical mutilation, mental retardation and mental disorder.

China's first special law on the handicapped — the Security Law on Protection of the Handicapped — took effect last May 15. Although the law passed only in December 1990, many government programmes have already been in place to ensure wider participation of the handicapped in the labour force.

The law stipulates that government offices, organisations, enterprises, institutions and collective economic undertakings can employ the handicapped in certain ratios and choose for them suitable work or post.

Today, according to Wu

Zhongze, the employment rate for the handicapped is 70 per cent in towns and small cities and 90 per cent in big and medium-sized cities. The number of handicapped people who were employed in 1990 was 2.3 times that in 1985.

"And we are obliged to encourage and help them to stand on their own," says Mr Wu, an official supervising China's social welfare work at the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

The handicapped in urban areas are basically self-reliant, but those in rural areas — who make up about 80 per cent of the country's handicapped population — "constitute a big problem," says Tian Bin, director in charge of labour in the Chinese Federation for the Handicapped. Their channels for employment, for example, are limited.

Mr Tian says the Federation will focus on helping the handicapped in rural areas. It plans to improve its job training for them through the Federation's 28 training centres as well as the 2,000 trading centres run by the Ministry of Labour.

If the handicapped comprise over 35 per cent of employees, such factories or collectives are considered "social welfare enterprises." These are exempted from income tax. Where over 50 per cent of the workforce is composed of the handicapped, the enterprises are exempted from product tax or increment value duties.

Other preferential policies given to welfare enterprises include priority in the supply of raw materials, sales, capital

loans and technological renovation. These policies, says Mr Wu, "have positively inspired the development of the welfare enterprises."

Today there are 1.59 million handicapped people working in 42,000 welfare enterprises across China. Their products range from rubber, hardware, toys and cosmetics to electronics and machine tools. The output of these welfare enterprises was valued at 30 billion yuan (more than US \$5 billion) in 1990, or 6.5 times more than in 1985.

Most of the profits are retained by the welfare enterprises or used to fund other welfare projects, says Shi Hui, an official with the Beijing Municipal Civil Industry Corporation which is composed of 17 welfare factories.

Generally, Mr Wu points out, the handicapped in welfare enterprises makes an income no less than what an average worker makes.

The central government used to be the sole operator of welfare enterprises. But since 1982, communities and other collectives have been encouraged to run them as well. Today there are 40,000 neighbourhood welfare factories as compared with 1,000 in 1982.

All the welfare enterprises have adapted themselves to the economic reforms adopted since 1985, Mr Wu says. That is to say, they have to assume sole responsibility for their profits or losses rather than turn to the government for their economic failure, which used to be the case.

Development is Another Name for Peace

THE Cold War and the arms race wasted resources that might have been used to bring about world peace. New ways of thinking about peace, justice, human rights, security and development, need to replace the Cold War mentality.

We cannot afford to pursue only economic development or national security alone; our understanding of these concepts has not expanded to include such priorities as protecting the environment and safeguarding a cultural heritage.

Because the context of international relationships has changed, the ideal new world order is one in which power structures are redefined and peace depends on a properly functioning United Nations. Now, the UN not only serves to reflect world opinion, but also takes an active role in generating global awareness and action. This can be seen in the

growing environment-transcend national boundaries and laws.

Interrelationship of Ingredients

Despite amazing progress toward democratizing during the last two years, 1 billion people still live in abject poverty and 16 million people are refugees. We must confront and resolve the growing divergence between the views of developed and developing nations, the North and the South, about the role of the United Nations.

Solving problems such as the population explosion, weapons proliferation, ethnic and religious rivalries, unresolved regional conflicts, large refugee populations, and achieving peace, justice and development for all people, should be our priorities.

must be strengthened by the political will of the governments and the involvement of the NGO community. At the United Nations, a balance must be struck between the interests of both small and large states, by enhancing the role of the Secretary-General, the Secretariat and the General Assembly, as well as by revitalizing the Security Council.

Promoting Economic and Social Justice

Economic and social justice go together. For the first time they seem to be within our reach. There is a new paradigm for society's understanding of, concern with, and determination to improve the human condition; as the political will to invest in the world's children has demonstrated.

Development must be people-centered. Justice is legal and ethical imperative; new ethical and spiritual imperatives are required to focus on

human rights.

Through universalism, a balanced approach to development should begin to replace both the dominance of the military-industrial complex and the localized concentration of economic wealth and power in transnationals. Poverty in the South and affluence in the North both result in ecological devastation. Power must be shared. Habits of greed and waste cannot inhibit a world economy that will grow five-fold in the next two generations. Cutting military spending by 5 to perhaps 50 per cent can lead to better health and education for humanity.

NGOs and the private sector should ally with governments, while holding institutions and governments responsible for their actions. Finally, by organizing and decentralizing community life, NGOs can effectively aid the development process. — UNIC Feature.

Award-winning farmer Ploughs a Lonely Furrow

by Coleen Lowe Moma

HARARE, ZIMBABWE: Conventional wisdom has it that the more you clear your field and the deeper you plough, the better farmer you are. Brian Oldrieve, a winner of Zimbabwe's Maize Grower of the Year Award, disagrees.

"To me, ploughing is about the worst thing you can do to the soil," he says. "When you plough you destroy the root anchorage and the channels of the rotting roots allow the moisture to go down. Turning the roots over destroys their natural ability to cushion raindrops, hold soil in position and aid infiltration."

Many farmers believe that ploughing vast quantities of dry matter into the soil improves its structure. "In fact, you do not improve the organic status very much by incorporating it at depth," the Zimbabwean farmer maintains. "What happens in nature is that you have organic matter on the surface. Soil fauna, like earthworms, take it down into the soil and the mulch cover cushions the impact of the raindrop, allowing it to sink in."

Oldrieve says that ploughing is responsible for fluffing up the soil, preparing the perfect situation for it to be washed away. The less farmers till the soil, the better off they would be.

A fervent believer in conservation tillage, Oldrieve speaks with first-hand experience of both commercial and communal areas. He started experimenting with conservation tillage for purely economic reasons. Hired to manage the ailing Hinton Estates in north-west Matepatepa, Oldrieve found it difficult to make a go of the job because of the poor condition of the soil.

"Regular burning and fine tith cultivation had caused an almost complete breakdown of soil structure, leading to an unacceptably high level of water run off," he recalls. "To restructure the soil, increase moisture infiltration and stop soil loss, our best hope was to reduce tillage and leave crop residue on the surface as mulch."

From small beginnings, 95 per cent of the crops on the 1700-hectare (4590 acre) estate are now planted directly into the minimally disturbed mulch of the previous crop.

With Ephraim Kunaka, the headmaster of Shopo school in the adjoining Chiweshe communal lands, Oldrieve has devised conservation tillage methods appropriate to the small-scale farmer on the school plot.

However, even with this method of cropping, it is necessary to bury the seeds in the soil, and methods had to be devised for doing so. In the case of the small-scale farmer, Oldrieve and Kunaka have found that this can be achieved by digging a small hole over the root of the previous plant before the rains come. With the rains, the seed

and fertiliser are placed in the hole and covered. The new crop can use the channels created by the rotting roots of the old plant to capture maximum moisture.

Some planting at the Hinton Estates is done in this way. But because of the scale involved, greater mechanisation is necessary. According to Oldrieve, simple modifications to the farm's planting machinery have made it possible to use it both for distributing and buying the seed. Another possibility is to use the ripper tine, an implement which cuts the soil only where the seed is going to be planted.

Once the crop in growing, the major challenge for both small and large-scale farmers is how to keep it free of weeds, since the students do the weeding by hand as part of their gardening. But, reports Kunaka, who has been experimenting with conservation tillage on his own plot, weeding a typical small-scale farm is one of the farmers' biggest headaches.

Oldrieve argues, however, that the main problem in the communal areas is that weeds are left until they are fully grown, and all the work is left to women. If weeding is done for a few hours each day, while the weeds are still small, and with the help of the whole family, he has calculated, a small field can be kept weed-free without much difficulty.

On a large-scale farm this is not possible. The main solution at Hinton has been to use chemical herbicides — which has led some critics to charge that although conservation tillage helps conserve the soil, there is an environmental cost in the form of increased herbicide use.

Oldrieve maintains, however, that with conservation tillage, herbicide use gradually decreases. But as a conservationist, Oldrieve admits that he would rather not use herbicides at all, and is working on finding alternatives.

Nevertheless, the improved yields that accrue from better care of the soil are impressive. Kunaka says that both at the school and on his farm he has seen yields double.

From a farm that seemed doomed, Hinton states boasts maize yields of nine tonnes per hectare (compared with the average commercial yield in Zimbabwe of five tonnes per hectare); wheat yields of 6.45 tonnes per hectare (compared with the average commercial yield of 5.5 tonnes per hectare); and cotton yields of 3,400 kilograms per hectare (compared with an average commercial yield of 2,700 kilograms per hectare).

Although farmers are generally hesitant about changing traditional cultivation methods, Oldrieve believes that conservation tillage is ultimately the best hope not only for Zimbabwe but for Africa. — PANOS